

Lieutenant Governor Loren Leman
Alaska Faith-based and Community Initiatives Scoping Meeting
Loussac Library
February 20, 2003 at 10:00 am

OPENING

Good morning. I am pleased to see so many of you who are dedicating your lives to serving people. You are serving in a very important role in our State's social service safety net.

One of the first things Governor Murkowski asked me to do after we were sworn in on December 2 was to begin working with our faith-based and volunteer communities in Alaska to determine how we in State government—and you in the volunteer communities—can work together to better serve the needs of people.

We are 80 days into our Administration and are tackling the challenges of redesigning government, addressing our priorities, and making government smaller and smarter. You are already doing a lot to help. But we need more.

You will hear Governor Murkowski and me talk a lot about our resources—and they are important. We have been blessed with a resource-rich State with unparalleled natural beauty. As valuable as our natural resources are, however, they pale in comparison to our richest resource, the people of Alaska. Serving the needs of people is our highest priority—you have our commitment.

The measure of our success will not necessarily be by a new program from Washington, D.C.—or Juneau—or even high oil prices. Rather, it will be by each of us stepping up and taking individual responsibility. Caring for the most vulnerable among us is a measure of that responsibility.

Fourteen years ago, when I was a freshman member of the State House, I suggested that a lot of the social service programs we were doing really shouldn't be primarily the responsibility of government. Rather we should take on this responsibility individually—as family, friends, neighbors, social groups and churches to really care for the needy among us. That, as you know, takes personal investment.

I am pleased that we have a President who also believes this—and who is taking constructive action to make it happen. I just returned last Saturday from Washington, D.C. where I met with President Bush's staff

to discuss their Faith-based and Community Initiatives. The President is committed to helping organizations such as yours. His Administration has proposed changes in regulations, called "Charitable Choice", to level the playing field for faith-based charities. He is working with members of Congress to enact legislation to encourage more charitable giving. And his is actively promoting volunteerism. In a few minutes, you will hear more about the President's vision from Balan Ayyar, from the White House.

I am also pleased to be working with Governor Murkowski who shares this vision. He has selected Commissioners and key staff to work to make this happen in Alaska. DHSS Commissioner Joel Gilbertson is online from Juneau. He has told me several times how important this is to him.

I know many of you know Karleen Jackson, incoming Deputy Commissioner for DHSS. She extended her stay in Anchorage to attend this meeting. Although Catholic Social Services is sad to lose you, we are excited about the net gain you bring to the Department and thereby to all service providers.

I also commend Chaplaincy Coordinator Mike Ensich for his dedication in the Department of Corrections. Also Anchorage DHHS Director Jewel Jones, who has provided a friendly relationship for the faith-based community in Anchorage for several years.

PURPOSE OF MEETING

Our purpose is not to tell you how to do your job. You are already doing it. We do not want to assert more government control over your organizations. We do want to identify success stories and celebrate them. We also want to identify what could work better if government would make changes in its rules and remove barriers. Finally, we'd like to know what we are not now doing, but could, if government could remove barriers and allow people to step up.

By our constitution, State government has a responsibility for providing for the health and welfare of Alaskans. However, it does not have a monopoly on compassion—and it does not have to be the total vehicle for accomplishing its goal.

You who work in the faith communities know that the real answer to many of the challenges we face in society is to put hope in hearts—and a sense of purpose in lives. You do it by saying, "God loves you, I love you and you can count on us both."

My goal is to start scoping out things that we can address in the short-term and then map out a strategy for accomplishing longer-range goals during the next four years.

I am anxious to hear from you on how we can make this happen.